

The Strategy: OPENERS

When I read stories or watched films about grisly metamorphoses - Dr. Jekyll becoming Mr. Hyde, the mild husband changing into a werewolf, the kindly neighbor taken over by a brutal alien - I could not help seeing my own father's mutation from sober to drunk.

Scott Russell Sanders, "Under the Influence"

In that instant in too short a time, one would have thought, even for the bullet to get there, a mysterious, terrible change had come over the elephant....At last, after what seemed a long time - it might have been five seconds, I dare say - he sagged flabbily to his knees.

George Orwell, "On Shooting an Elephant"

Had he called me a nymphomaniac or a necrophiliac, I couldn't have been more puzzled.

Gloria Naylor, "Mommy, What does 'Nigger' Mean?"

Let me tell you something: from then until I left that prison, in every free moment I had, if I was not reading in the library, I was reading on my bunk."

Malcolm X, "Coming to an Awareness of Language"

The Strategy: INTERRUPTORS

I spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another sunlight underneath, mighty operas.

Maxine Hong Kingston, "Tongue-Tied"

As a softy who is scarcely able to take a knife to a raw chicken - let alone hold one to a person's throat - I was surprised, embarrassed, and dismayed all at once.

Brent Staples, "Black Men and Public Space"

His face was coated with mud, the eyes wide open, the teeth bared and grinning with an expression of unendurable agony. (Never tell me, by the way, that the dead look peaceful. Most of the corpses I have seen looked devilish.)

At last, after what seemed a long time - it might have been five seconds, I dare say - he sagged flabbily to his knees.

George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"

I write, therefore, to drag into the light what eats at me - the fear, the guilt, the shame - so that my own children may be spared.

Scott Russell Sanders, "Under the Influence"

The Strategy: CLOSERS

No, I do not weep at the world - I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to be Colored Me"

So many movements unbalanced me, and as I pulled the door open I fell over backward, landing fully clothed on the toilet seat with my legs splayed in front of me: the old beetle-on-its-back routine.

Nancy Mairs, "On Being a Cripple"

And I saw that it was possible to love it: that in fact, for all it had taught me of shame and anger and inner vision, I *did* love it.

Alice Walker, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self"

I do not remember what all the words were; but I do know that *mother, father, sister, teacher* were among them - words that were to make the world blossom for me.

Helen Keller, "The Day Language Came into My Life"

The Strategy: REPETITION

Every native would like to find a way out, every native would like a rest, every native would like a tour. But some natives - most natives in the world - cannot go anywhere. They are too poor. They are too poor to go anywhere. They are too poor to escape the reality of their lives; and they are too poor to live properly in the place where they live, which is the very place you, the tourist, want to go - so when the natives see you, the tourist, they envy you, they envy your ability to leave your own banality and boredom, they envy your ability to turn their own banality and boredom into a source of pleasure for yourself.

Jamaica Kincaid, "The Ugly Tourist"

I remember:

I remember:

But mostly, I remember this:

Alice Walker, "Beauty: When the Other Dancer is the Self"

At dark, shadowy intersections, I could cross in front of a car stopped at a traffic light and elicit the *thunk*, *thunk*, *thunk* of the driver - black, white, male, or female - hammering down the door locks.

Brent Staples, "Black Men and Public Space"

The Strategy: PATTERENED LONG SENTENCES

And so, ordinarily, you are a nice person, an attractive person, a person capable of drawing to yourself the affection of other people (people just like you), a person at home in your own skin (sort of; I mean, in a way; I mean, your dismay and puzzlement are natural to you, because people just like you just seem to be like that, and so many of the things people like you find admirable about yourselves - the things you think about, the things you think really define you - seem rooted in these feelings): a person at home in your own house (and all its nice house things), with its nice back yard (and its nice back-yard things), at home on your street, your church, in community activities, your job, at home with your family, your relatives, your friends - you are a whole person.

Jamaica Kincaid, "The Ugly Tourist"

As a boy in Mississippi, Father sold Coca-Cola during dances while the moonshiners peddled their brew in the parking lot; as a young blade, he fought in bars and in the ring, seeking a state Golden Gloves championship; he gambled at poker, hunted pheasants, raced motorcycles and cars, played semiprofessional baseball, and, along with all his buddies - in the Black Cat Saloon, behind the cotton gin, in the woods - he drank.

Scott Russell Sanders - "Under the Influence"

The Strategy: EVOCATIVE GRAMMAR

Music. The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us. He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am so colored.

Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to be Colored Me"

This is a class act, ladies and gentlemen. No tears, no recriminations, no faint-heartedness.

If I could make a cosmic deal, who would I put in my place? What in my life would I give up in exchange for sound limbs and a thrilling rush of energy? No one. Nothing. I might as well do the job myself. Now that I'm getting the hang of it.

Nancy Mairs, "On Being a Cripple"